

## Some features of the Primitive Dravidian Tongue

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JUST like the Primitive Indo-European mother-tongue, which the Philologists have constructed as the result of an inter-comparison of the facts of the various groups of languages belonging to the Indo-European family, the primitive mother-tongue of the Dravidian group of languages may also be traced by an inter-comparison of the grammatical facts of the languages spoken in Southern India. To talk of a primitive Dravidian language may be exasperating to some of those who, while denying an independent existence to the languages of South India, are inclined to maintain that the languages spoken throughout India or even perhaps the whole world, are either allied to the Indo-European or derived from Sanskrit or Prakrit. But a family relationship between Tamil, Telugu, Kanarese, Malayalam, Tulu and some other languages of the hill tribes spoken in southern and central India cannot be doubted by anybody, and until the grammatical facts and the word material of all these languages are satisfactorily traced to the Aryan sources, their cognate relationship with the Aryan or Indo-European cannot be an accomplished fact. Some Dravidian scholars like Dr. Caldwell, while connecting these languages with the so-called Scythian group, considered that there might be a remote possibility of contact between the Aryan and the Dravidian groups of languages at their original sources in pre-historic times, while others thought that the Dravidian was a direct off-shoot of the Aryan. But there are a few other scholars who consider the Dravidian to be neither Aryan nor Scythian, but an independent group by itself.

Leaving aside the question of ultimate relationship of these languages for the present, and depending upon the family-relationship that these languages of South India bear to one another, one can try the possibility of tracing the earlier form of language of which these must have been the later developments, since they bear a family-relationship with common linguistic characteristics of their own. If we bring together all the distinguishing features found common to these languages and try to trace them to their original sources, we may get an idea of the general features of their common mother tongue. Of course, much has yet to be done even by way of comparison and construction in connection with these languages, unlike Indo-European. Yet the general agglutinative nature which these languages have yet preserved to a great extent, may help to make our task easier. By a comparison of their grammatical facts and word-

material one can have a distant vision of the primitive mother tongue, which the following characteristics seem to indicate.

The language of the primitive Dravidian seems to be mainly a language of roots. These were not merely the results of grammatical analysis, but forms of regular usage in the language. They were placed one after another in a sentence, the relation between them being indicated by their position in it, the former generally standing in an attributive relation to the latter. There was nothing like what we now call inflexion either verbal or nominal. The root itself did the function of a verb as well as of a noun,—first without any change, but later on with a little change in the ending. What we now call the grammatical forms and inflexion gradually developed in the language in the following manner. The root words which were appended to other roots in order to convey different significations in meaning, lost their original shape and meaning owing to the rapidity in pronunciation and other causes, and began to be used as unmeaning suffixes, and made to perform certain grammatical functions in the sentence. This stage must have developed rapidly after it came into contact with the highly inflexional Aryan language, Sanskrit, and after the languages came to be analysed after the manner of Sanskrit grammatical methods. The root itself was used as a verb in the primitive language, just as we now use it in the imperative second person singular. The ideas of mood, tense, gender, etc., must have been indicated either by means of gestures made along with the utterance of the roots or by suffixing other independent roots to them in order to draw the distinction in meaning. Thus the principle of root-agglutination was brought into operation with the growth of the ideas regarding time, gender, number, etc. The agglutinative nature of these languages is still preserved in such a way that even at this distance of time it is quite possible to separate from the roots the various parts denoting gender, number, etc. In the early stage of the development of that language the forms of *agu*, *isu*, *utu*, developed from the simple primitive roots *a*, *I*, *u*., seem to have been very much in use as auxiliary roots emphasising the verbal function of the roots to which they were appended. Forms in 'Ku \*', and \* Kum' which appear in the major languages of this group, namely, Tamil *Seygum*, Kanarese *Geygum*, Telugu *Cheyu(m)n*, Velgu(m)n, etc., which are used in them even to this day without distinction of time, mood, number, or gender, and on that account termed as Taddharmadhaka forms by the Telugu grammarians, indicate the early condition of the common mother tongue when such distinctions in the verbal forms have not yet developed. Later on, this 'Ku' or \* Kum' appearing at the end of a good number of roots was considered as a formative suffix by the Tamil grammarians, while still later Telugu grammarians consider-

ing this *Ku* or 'gu' as a part of the original root called the gu-ending form '*velugu*' the root.

Thus, most of the so-called '*git*'-ending roots found in Telugu have to be considered as secondary roots, and not as primary ones. Later on, distinction in time was drawn by the help of other roots. The word '*itu*' appended to other roots indicated past action (c.f. Tamil *Sey (i)den*, etc. Kanarese *Madidenu*, Telugu *Chesitini*), while '*iru*', '*undu*' and '*avu*' denoted present tense in Tamil, Telugu and Kanarese, *Seyg(u)iren*, *Cheyuchunnu*, *geyd-aped*, respectively. The very fact that these languages used different roots to express the idea of the *Present* goes to show that the Present forms in these languages were formed after they got separated and settled as independent languages. The idea of causation seems to have been first indicated by the doubling of the final consonants of the roots as now found in Tamil, but later on the help of the root '*isu*' was sought to express this idea, as is found in Kanarese and Telugu. Similarly, various other roots or words were pressed into service by different languages at different times to express various ideas. Different roots brought together to express particular shades of meaning got fused after a time into one, and came to be considered as new roots having particular meanings of their own. Thus new roots developed in the Languages, and it is sometimes very difficult to split up these compound roots and trace their original forms. One language considers the compound root itself as the simple one, while the original component parts are preserved in other languages. We have thus to compare the roots in different languages and carefully note the changes in meaning they have acquired during this process of composition before we can get at the original forms of roots, which seem to be generally monosyllabic. It can be thus clearly shown that this process of root-agglutination has been going on since the time of the primitive Dravidian to this very day in the development of these languages.

The same method can be applied in the case of Nominal Inflexion. The root originally functioned as a verb as well as a noun. As has already been said, the position of the roots in a sentence indicated their relation to one another, the former standing in the relation of an attribute to the latter. This was the condition of the primitive language. When it was felt that the idea of their relationship should be made clearer or more expressive, various words like '*atu* \ <sup>f</sup>in', etc., came to be introduced between them. These lost their independent existence in course of time, and began to be considered as mere connecting links or sariyai, inflexional increments, or aupavibhaktika-pratyayas. A comparative study of the methods of nominal inflexion in these languages clearly shows that the whole of this so-called inflexion merely depended origin-

ally on mere attributive relationship. It is because the grammarians who first analysed these languages and wrote their grammars, merely followed the methods of analysis adopted by Sanskrit grammarians in their analysis of that highly inflexional tongue that these languages also came to possess a nominal inflexion with eight cases, and a verbal inflexion with many moods, voices, etc.

Since the principle of root-agglutination has been at work throughout all these ages in these languages, we can, by just forgetting for a time the analogy of the highly inflexional Sanskrit, and by tracing the various forms of inflexion to their original sources in independent words or roots, reach the common primitive Dravidian form, which was made up of mere roots, without any special unmeaning marks of tense, gender, number, case, etc. It may be argued that the various languages of the Indo-European group or of any other group, for the matter of that, must have developed their inflexion on similar lines, but it cannot be denied that they do not give us sufficient clues for tracing their history back to their original root stage, while it can be said that the Dravidian Languages still possess clues which lead us gradually back towards their common origin, namely the parent Dravidian tongue.